

February 2008 – Since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement by the Maoists and the government more than a year ago, Nepal's political transition has seen both positive and negative developments.



On the positive side, the Constituent Assembly (CA) election has been set for mid-April, after being twice postponed, and the political parties appear committed to the polls. On the negative side, a proliferation of armed groups, an increase in communal tensions, and a sometimes violent political rights movement in the southern plains region (Terai) have threatened to destabilize the country in the run up to the elections. It is in this environment that the Nepalese are preparing for a historic election to decide the country's future.

Aiming to increase awareness of the transition process in Nepal's troubled eastern Terai, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) has provided support for a unique radio program that was launched by the region's oldest and most popular radio station. Using a format new to stations outside of Kathmandu, Koshi FM has been sending teams of bilingual radio journalists to rural areas to dialogue with residents and record their concerns and questions on pressing political issues such as the elections, the security situation, and the role of the CA.



The recorded comments are then played on the air and addressed in the studio by a panel of local experts. Dialogues have been held in both Maithili- and Nepali-speaking communities, and the shows are being broadcast, translated into the other language, and rebroadcast. In this way, both Maithili-speaking and Nepali-speaking citizens are able to hear the concerns of the other group.

The show, titled "Shanti Batuwa" (Peace Traveler), has become a regional hit. Koshi FM is frequently contacted by listeners asking about program topics and requesting that the Peace Traveler journalists visit their communities. In one instance, when the radio journalists entered a village, the residents became so excited that they devised and started singing a song of peace on the spot. The station has received many requests from local political leaders who wish to serve as panelists, and because the locally produced show is so widely known in the region, workers at Koshi FM jokingly claim that they should change the station's name to Shanti Batuwa. To ensure that this popular show can continue, USAID/OTI is providing additional support for the program.